



BACK TO BASICS

Don't Forget the Benefits of Hand Washing

As we leave summer behind and enter into fall and winter, we so too enter the cold and flu season. While you should indeed get your yearly flu shot, don't mistakenly think that vaccinations can protect you from every illness or from getting sick altogether. To be sure, the very basic act of hand washing can protect your health just as well as some of our most recent and sophisticated treatments.

Good old-fashioned hand washing is one of the simplest and most important things you can do to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Proper washing removes germs from your hands. If you have harmful germs on your hands and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth you can get sick.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO WASH YOUR HANDS?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) you can effectively wash

your hands and help prevent the spread of germs and disease in about 30 seconds:

- » **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (it doesn't matter if the water is cold or warm).
- » Apply soap and **lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap.
- » **Scrub** for at least 20 seconds.
- » **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- » **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

IS ANTIBACTERIAL SOAP REALLY BETTER?

Studies reveal that there is no added health benefit of using soaps containing or advertising antibacterial ingredients compared with using plain soap (this does not include





professionals in a healthcare setting). In fact, plain soap may do a better job of preserving the beneficial bacteria on your hands. Believe it or not, your entire body is covered with natural bacteria, and if you remove this “good” bacteria, it can be replaced by another, potentially harmful kind.

ARE HAND SANITIZERS EFFECTIVE?

Several studies show that hand sanitizers work well and are ideal in healthcare settings like hospitals because hands often come into contact with germs but are generally not heavily soiled or greasy. Hand sanitizers can also be beneficial during cold and flu season. For example, if you sneeze, it's much easier to clean your hands with sanitizer (especially if you're in a public place and far from a bathroom) as opposed to getting up and washing your hands.

However, when your hands become visibly dirty or greasy (i.e., after handling food, being outside, playing sports, etc.) hand sanitizers are not as effective. When your hands

are heavily soiled or greasy, hand sanitizers may not work well. Hand washing with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of harmful germs in these situations.

THE PROPER WAY TO APPLY HAND SANITIZERS

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Apply it to the palm of one hand and rub your hands together. Rub the sanitizer on your hands and fingers until dry (don't dry or wipe it off with a towel).



WHEN TO USE HAND SANITIZERS

If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.

